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The Strategic Challenge of Somalia's Al-Shabaab
Dimensions of Jihad

Since emerging from an era of colonialism under Italy and Britain, Somalia has passed through military dictatorship, famine, and civil war to regional fragmentation. In the modern period, Americans best remember the loss of U.S. military personnel that followed attempts to secure order in the country as part of a United Nations operation. More recently, the hijacking of ships by pirates operating from the Somali coast has attracted considerable attention globally. But the biggest threat emanating from Somalia comes from a different source: An ongoing lack of internal order has left the country vulnerable to the rise of hard-line Islamist groups, of which the latest is Al-Shabaab (the youth), which rose from obscurity to international prominence in less than two years. Al-Shabaab's ideological commitment to global jihadism, its connections to Al-Qaeda, its military capabilities, and its ability to capture and control territory suggest that it will continue to pose a strategic challenge to both the U.S. and Somalia's neighbors.

Since its emergence, Al-Shabaab has played a major role in the insurgency that pushed Ethiopian forces out of Somalia; it also received the endorsement of Osama bin Laden and has seen large numbers of Somalis living in the West flock to its camps. Somalia has become, like Pakistan, a significant Al-Qaeda safe haven.[1] Due to the relatively large number of Americans who travel to Somalia for military training, individuals linked to Al-Shabaab are among the top U.S. domestic terrorist threats.

Aden Hashi Ayro, an Al-Shabaab leader, was believed to have a strong relationship with Al-Qaeda. After his death by a U.S. airstrike, Al-Shabaab posted a biography of him, claiming "he fought under the supervision of Al-Qaeda, and with its logistical support and expertise."

Al-Shabaab emerged from two previous Somali Islamist groups, The Islamic Union (Al-Ittihad al-Islamiya, IU) and the Islamic Courts Union (Ittihad al-Mahakim al-Islamiya, ICU). There are three strands of evolution from the IU to the ICU and finally to Al-Shabaab. The first is ideological, in which the groups go through a funneling process and slowly become less ideologically diverse. Though all three strove to implement Shari'a (Islamic law), a significant faction of IU and ICU

leaders had a vision that focused on the Somali nation itself—that is, inside the borders of Somalia and in neighboring territories where Somalis are the predominant ethnic group, such as Ethiopia's Ogaden region. In contrast, key Al-Shabaab leaders are committed to a global jihadist ideology. They view the group's regional activities as part of a broader struggle.

The second strand lies in the groups' relations with Al-Qaeda. Bin Laden's organization has long had a presence in Somalia. It dispatched trainers to liaise with the Islamic Union prior to the 1993 battle of Mogadishu when eighteen U.S. soldiers were killed.[2] Despite that connection, some scholars have questioned how deep the ties between Al-Qaeda and the IU really are.[3] In contrast, after Al-Shabaab emerged as a distinct entity, its leaders reached out to Al-Qaeda's senior leadership, and its chief military strategist openly declared his allegiance to bin Laden.[4]

The final strand is the groups' opportunity and ability to govern. Since all three have been dedicated to implementing Shari'a, they would ideally like a governing apparatus through which to apply Islamic law and mete out God's justice. The Islamic Union could not control any territory for a sustained period apart from the town of Luuq. In contrast, the Islamic Courts and Al-Shabaab came to control broad swaths of Somalia, and the governing strategies they put in place indicate that both groups thought hard about how to maintain and expand their power.

Al-Shabaab's Origins

The practice of Islam in Somalia has traditionally been dominated by apolitical Sufi orders.[5] Islamist movements did not emerge until the late 1960s when Somalis gained greater exposure to less moderate currents of Islam in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and elsewhere.

In 1969, Gen. Mohamed Siad Barre executed a military coup that made him president of the young state,[6] which had won its independence nine years earlier. Some of Barre's draconian tactics for dealing with Somalia's fledgling Islamist movements consolidated the groups and gave them momentum. When Muslim leaders denounced reform of Somali family law, Barre executed ten prominent scholars and prosecuted hundreds more. In response, "[u]nderground organisations proliferated in every region in defence of the faith against the 'Godless socialists,'" writes Abdurahman M. Abdullahi.[7]

Though Barre ruled for more than twenty years, by the early 1990s he faced "widespread insurrection initiated by the tribes and powerbrokers."[8] Opponents forced him to flee the country, which collapsed into civil war and prolonged anarchy.

The Islamic Union. In these lawless conditions, two Islamist groups that were the progenitors of Al-Shabaab became prominent. The first was the Islamic Union. Although there is no firm date for the IU's birth,[9] most credible accounts date this to around 1983. Ken Menkhaus, an associate

professor of political science at Davidson College, notes that the IU was originally "comprised mainly of educated, young men who had studied or worked in the Middle East."[10] It received significant funding and support from—and was in turn influenced by—the Salafi/Wahhabi movement and its Saudi-based charity organizations. Members concluded that political Islam was the only way to rid their country of its corrupt leadership. The group had two goals. First, it sought to defeat Siad Barre's regime and replace it with an Islamic state. Second, it wanted to unify what it regarded as Greater Somalia—northeastern Kenya, Ethiopia's Ogaden region, and Djibouti—and add them to the existing Somali state.[11]

In 1991, after warlord Mohamed Farrah Aidid's rebel forces drove Barre into exile and destroyed his regime, the IU attempted to seize "targets of opportunity," including "strategic sites such as seaports and commercial crossroads."[12] It managed to hold the seaports of Kismayo and Merka for almost a year but was quickly expelled from Bosaso. Menkhaus notes that even with the prevailing lawlessness, Somalis were "suspicious of politically active Islam and remained attached to the clan as the sole source of protection."[13]

The IU managed to control one location for a sustained period: the town of Luuq near the border with Ethiopia and Kenya. Consonant with its original aspirations, the IU implemented strict Shari'a there, meting out punishments that included amputations. However, in a pattern that would later work to the advantage of Somali Islamists, rough justice in Luuq made it safer from crime than most other places.[14]

Luuq's proximity to Ethiopia was significant because of the IU's commitment to a Greater Somalia. In particular, the group focused on Ethiopia's Ogaden, a region inhabited by a majority of Somali speakers. The IU stirred up separatist unrest, and from 1996 to 1997, Ethiopia experienced a "string of assassination attempts and bombings by Al-Ittihad [IU] in Addis Ababa."[15] In response, Ethiopian forces intervened in Luuq and destroyed the IU's safe haven.

Questions linger over the degree to which the IU was linked to Al-Qaeda during its heyday. For example, an analysis published by West Point's Combating Terrorism Center finds numerous alleged ties between the IU and Al-Qaeda.[16]

Against this, Menkhaus argues that there has never been a smoking gun regarding the relationship between the IU and Al-Qaeda since "no Somalis appear in al-Qaeda's top leadership, and until 2003, no Somali was involved in a terrorist plot against a Western target outside of Somalia."[17]

Despite these divergent views, there are two important points about the IU-Al-Qaeda relationship. First, Al-Qaeda's leadership recognizes Somalia's role in one of its first actions, the first time it successfully bloodied America's nose. Al-Qaeda dispatched a small team of military trainers to Somalia in 1993, which liaised with the IU prior to the battle of Mogadishu.[18] Since then, Al-

Qaeda leaders have claimed that they—rather than the forces of Mohammed Farrah Aidid—were the real hand behind the U.S. defeat.[19] Many scholars believe these claims are highly exaggerated.[20] But the true facts behind the battle of Mogadishu are beside the point insofar as Al-Qaeda's perceptions are concerned since the "rosecolored memoirs of Somalia have … come to embody the 'founding myths' of the core Al-Qaida methodology."[21]

Second, it is clear that certain key members of the IU had strong relationships with bin Laden's group. One was Aden Hashi Ayro, who went on to lead Al-Shabaab. After Ayro's death, Al-Shabaab posted a Somali-language biography of him, claiming the battle of Mogadishu was "the first time he fought under the supervision of Al-Qaeda, and with its logistical support and expertise."[22] *The New York Times* would report at the time of Ayro's death that he was "long identified as one of Al Qaeda's top operatives in East Africa."[23]

Following the IU's defeat in Luuq, the group declined in prominence. By 2004, it was regarded as "a spent force, marginal if not defunct as an organization."[24]

The Islamic Courts Union. The ICU was the next incarnation of the Islamic Union. By the time it caught the attention of Westerners, it was more militarily adept than the old IU had been, more capable of governing, and had more leaders committed to a global jihadist ideology. International attention came in June 2006 when the ICU seized Mogadishu and thereafter won a rapid series of strategic gains. It took control of critical port cities such as Kismayo and met little resistance as it expanded.[25] Typical of the ICU's advance was its seizure of Beletuein on August 9, 2006. The local governor fled to Ethiopia almost immediately after fighting broke out between his forces and ICU militiamen.[26]

There was international concern during the ICU's rise. Some centered on the ICU's ideology. Writing in the Jamestown Foundation's *Terrorism Monitor*, Nairobi-based journalist Sunguta West noted that though the ICU's immediate goal was to establish Islamic rule in Somalia, "media reports allege that the Islamic courts are eyeing a bigger Islamic state in the long term carved out of East Africa, similar to the old goals of the IU, which wanted to create an Islamic state out of Somalia and Ethiopia [*sic*]."[27]

Other concerns focused on the ICU leadership. Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys, the most prominent ICU leader as head of its consultative council, had previously been an IU leader. West writes that Aweys "has a history of being connected to … al-Qaeda."[28] Indeed, Washington named Aweys a specially designated global terrorist in September 2001.[29]

By late October 2006, the ICU controlled most of Somalia's key strategic points, was able to move supplies from south to north, and had effectively encircled the U.N.-recognized transitional federal government in the south-central city of Baidoa. Somalia had some sixteen operational terrorist

training camps;[30] soon after the ICU rose to power, hundreds of terrorists from Afghanistan, Chechnya, Iraq, Pakistan, and the Arabian Peninsula arrived to train in or staff these camps. In 2006, the U.N. Monitoring Group on Somalia reported: "Foreign volunteers (fighters) have also been arriving in considerable numbers to give added military strength to the ICU. … Importantly, foreign volunteers also provide training in guerrilla warfare and special topics or techniques."[31]

Because the presence of foreign fighters suggested the ICU had ambitions beyond Somalia, some ICU leaders, such as Sheikh Yusuf Indohaadde, publicly denied that any foreign fighters were in Somalia. In a June 2006 press conference, he said, "We want to say in a loud voice that we have no enemies; we have not enmity toward anyone. There are no foreign terrorists here."[32] Weeks later, the Associated Press obtained a copy of an ICU recruitment videotape that showed Indohaadde north of Mogadishu alongside fighters from Arab Gulf states.[33] Another ICU leader, Sheikh Hassan "Turki" Abdullah Hersi, proclaimed: "Brothers in Islam, we came from Mogadishu, and we have thousands of fighters, some are Somalis and others are from the Muslim world. If Christian-led America brought its infidels, we now call to our Muslim holy fighters to come join us."[34]

International jihadist leaders took note of the ICU's rise. In an audiotape released in June 2006, Osama bin Laden stated, "We will continue, God willing, to fight you and your allies everywhere, in Iraq and Afghanistan and in Somalia and Sudan, until we waste all your money and kill your men, and you will return to your country in defeat as we defeated you before in Somalia"[35]—a clear nod to the rise of the Islamic Courts. In July, he issued an even stronger statement: "We warn all the countries in the world from accepting a U.S. proposal to send international forces to Somalia. We swear to God that we will fight their soldiers in Somalia, and we reserve our right to punish them on their lands and every accessible place at the appropriate time and in the appropriate manner."[36]

While the IU had little chance to rule beyond Luuq, the ICU imposed Shari'a on some of the key territory it controlled. The rules it imposed were far-reaching. It conducted mass arrests of citizens watching movies, abolished live music at weddings,[37] killed several people for watching soccer, [38] and arrested a karate instructor and his female students because the lessons constituted mixing of the sexes.[39]

Strict implementation of Shari'a often alienates locals, but as the ICU gained power, it was determined to win over the population. Hassan Dahir Aweys sought to harness Islam, Somali nationalism, and distaste for the rule of the warlords.[40] His emphasis on stability and the rule of law won the sympathy of the business community, which saw the ICU's strict rule as a means to reduce security costs.[41] There are no reliable estimates for security costs before the ICU's rise, but the U.N. Monitoring Group's 2006 study reported that checkpoints established by the warlords cost businesses several million dollars a year. The ICU's elimination of certain extortionate

checkpoints reduced business expenses, often by up to 50 percent.[42] Citizens who previously had to live under insecure, anarchic conditions also benefited from improved security under the Islamic Courts.

The Rise of Al-Shabaab

By late 2006, Baidoa—the last stronghold of the transitional federal government—was under siege. Many fighters defected from the government to the ICU; all that prevented the government's destruction were Ethiopian soldiers manning roadblocks around the city.[43]

But as the ICU launched an assault on Baidoa, Ethiopia responded with greater force than expected. The Islamic Courts could not match Ethiopian airpower. U.S. air and ground forces supported Ethiopia's intervention by sending armaments and personnel including helicopter gunships and the elite Task Force 88.[44] The Ethiopians and the transitional government wrested Mogadishu from the ICU on December 28, 2006, and quickly reversed virtually all of its strategic gains.[45]

However, there was no coherent plan to stabilize the country and make the transitional government viable. The head of the ICU's executive council, Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed—now the Somali president—called for an insurgency.[46] Even before Ethiopia intervened, the U.N.'s Monitoring Group on Somalia had warned that the ICU "is fully capable of turning Somalia into what is currently an Iraq-type scenario, replete with roadside and suicide bombers, assassinations, and other forms of terrorist and insurgent-type activities."[47]

Al-Shabaab emerged as a distinct force during the course of the insurgency. The break between Al-Shabaab and other insurgent groups came in late 2007. That September, the ICU attended a conference of opposition factions in the Eritrean capital, Asmara, and reemerged as the Alliance for the Reliberation of Somalia (ARS). Al-Shabaab boycotted the conference, and its leaders launched vitriolic attacks on the ARS for failing to adopt a global jihadist ideology.[48] In late February 2008, fighting between supporters of the ARS and Al-Shabaab in Dhobley killed several people. [49] As Ethiopian fighters left Somalia in early 2009, fighters affiliated with Al-Shabaab took their place and implemented a strict version of Shari'a in areas they came to control.

Al-Shabaab's Ideology

Al-Shabaab represents a further step toward a global jihadist vision. Like the Islamic Union and Islamic Courts, it believes that religious governance is the solution to Somalia's ills. When addressing a rally in the southern city of Marka, Sheikh Mukhtar Robow, an Al-Shabaab spokesman, emphasized the importance of complying with Islamic law.[50] In an effort to show

that Shari'a was equitable, Robow stated that "punishment would be meted out to anyone," including mujahideen, citing a mujahid executed in Waajid as an example.[51]

One important document explaining Al-Shabaab's outlook was written by the American mujahid Abu Mansoor al-Amriki. He gained notoriety in the U.S. when he appeared in a sophisticated Al-Shabaab video dated April 2, 2009, "that employs hip-hop and looks more like an extreme version of 'Survivor.'"[52]

In January 2008, Amriki wrote a document entitled "A Message to the Mujaahideen in Particular and Muslims in General" that rapidly made its way around the jihadist web. In it, he reiterated the need to establish Shari'a, citing as exemplars Sayyid Qutb, the leading theoretician of the Muslim Brotherhood, and Abu A'la Maududi, founder of the Islamist Jama'at-i Islami in India and Pakistan, both of whom "refused to accept entering into the *kaafir* [infidel] governments as a solution."[53] He specified commitment to Islamic law as a means of distinguishing Al-Shabaab from the Alliance for the Reliberation of Somalia. Amriki explained that Al-Shabaab had boycotted the Asmara conference because it refused to work with the non-Muslim Eritrean state.[54] He argued that cooperation with "infidels" would corrupt the jihad because Eritrea would open "the door of politics in order for them to forget armed resistance," leaving "members of the Courts in the lands of the *Kuffaar*, underneath their control, sitting in the road of politics which leads to the loss and defeat they were running from."[55] Indeed, Amriki's screed underscores the gradations from the IU to the ICU and finally to Al-Shabaab. His criticisms of the Islamic Courts emphasize Al-Shabaab's global jihadist perspective. He touts Al-Shabaab's pan-Islamism in opposition to the ICU's clan-backed politics, saying that "the Courts used to judge over each individual tribe," whereas "Al-Shabaab were made up of many different tribes."[56]

Though a non-Somali like Amriki may overlook the continuing importance of clan politics even within Al-Shabaab, other Al-Shabaab leaders have said that the group wants to undermine the country's clan structure. When Robow addressed the Marka rally, *Kataaib* reported that he "declared that from now on it is prohibited to say that so-and-so clan cannot control over there, or so-and-so clan cannot govern so-and-so region. He made it clear that this land belongs to Allah and anyone who imposes the Islamic law in it can govern it."[57]

Amriki also attacked the Islamic Courts for having "a goal limited to the boundaries placed by the *Taghoot* [a ruler who fails to implement the divine law]" while "the Shabaab had a global goal including the establishment of the Islaamic [*sic*] *Khilaafah* [caliphate] in all parts of the world." [58] While this criticism is not entirely accurate ("Greater Somalia" was not strictly limited by colonial borders), Amriki showed that key Al-Shabaab leaders now saw their efforts as part of a global struggle.

Amriki also provides an extended discussion of Al-Shabaab's *manhaj*, or religious methodology. He writes:

> It is the same *manhaj* repeatedly heard from the mouth of the *mujaahid shaykh* Usaamah Bin Laden … the doctor Ayman ath-Thawaahiri [bin Laden's right-hand man] … and the hero, Abu Mus'ab az-Zarqaawi [leader of Al-Qaeda in Iraq].[59]

He thus makes clear that Al-Shabaab was aligned ideologically with Al-Qaeda.

Other Al-Shabaab leaders have said that they see the continuation of jihad beyond Somalia as a religious imperative. In early 2009, *Kataaib* reported that Sheikh Ali Muhammad Hussein, the group's Banadir region governor, gave a media briefing on Ethiopia's withdrawal. He said that "the fact that the enemy has left Mogadishu does not mean that the mujahideen will not follow him to where he still remains," adding that in compliance with the command of God, "he will be pursued everywhere and more traps will be laid for him." Hussein added that the idea that the jihad had ended with Ethiopia's withdrawal was "in clear contradiction with the statement of Prophet Muhammad … that jihad will continue until Doomsday."[60]

In early 2008, when the U.S. designated Al-Shabaab a global terrorist entity, prominent members struck a celebratory tone. Robow told the BBC that he welcomed the designation as an "honor" because "[w]e are good Muslims and the Americans are infidels. We are on the right path."[61] Though Robow then denied a connection to Al-Qaeda, his position has since changed. In August 2008, he said that Al-Shabaab was "negotiating how we can unite into one" with Al-Qaeda.[62] He continued, "We will take our orders from Sheikh Osama bin Laden because we are his students."[63] And Saleh Ali Saleh Nabhan, Al-Shabaab's chief military strategist, formally reached out to Al-Qaeda's senior leadership in a 24-minute video entitled "March Forth," which circuited the jihadi web on August 30, 2008.[64] In it, Nabhan offers salutations to bin Laden and pledges allegiance to "the courageous commander and my honorable leader."[65]

Al-Qaeda Reciprocates

Al-Qaeda has not ignored Al-Shabaab's overtures. They first took note of developments in Somalia in 2006 when the Islamic Courts captured Mogadishu. When Ethiopia intervened to push back the ICU's advance on Baidoa, Al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri soon appeared in a web-based video and called for Muslims to fight the Ethiopians:

> I appeal to the lions of Islam in Yemen, the state of faith and wisdom. I appeal to my brothers, the lions of Islam in the Arab Peninsula, the cradle of conquests. And I also appeal to my brothers, the lions of Islam in Egypt, Sudan, the Arab Maghreb, and everywhere in the Muslim world to rise up to aid their Muslim brethren in Somalia.[66]

On July 5, 2007, he released a new video, describing Somalia as one of the three main theaters for Al-Qaeda's mujahideen, along with Iraq and Afghanistan.[67] The Al-Qaeda propagandist Abu Yahya al-Libi devoted an entire video to urging Muslims to join the Somali mujahideen.[68]

On November 19, 2008, Zawahiri responded to Nabhan's video with one in which he called Al-Shabaab "my brothers, the lions of Islam in Somalia." He urged them to "hold tightly to the truth for which you have given your lives, and don't put down your weapons before the mujahid state of Islam [has been established] and Tawheed has been set up in Somalia."[69]

Bin Laden himself issued a video devoted to Al-Shabaab in March 2009, entitled "Fight on, Champions of Somalia," where he addresses "my patient, persevering Muslim brothers in mujahid Somalia." Here, bin Laden explicitly endorses Al-Shabaab and denounces the Alliance for the Reliberation of Somalia, saying that when NATO supported former president Abdullahi Yusuf, the mujahideen were not fooled. "They replaced him and brought in a new, revised version," says bin Laden, "similar to Sayyaf, Rabbani, and Ahmed Shah Massoud, who were leaders of the Afghan mujahideen before they turned back on their heels [as apostates]."[70] In bin Laden's view, Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed—who had been an ICU official before becoming ARS's leader—also falls into this category.

Bin Laden explains that in becoming the new president of Somalia, Sharif "agreed to partner infidel positive law with Islamic Shari'a to set up a government of national unity," and in that way apostatized from Islam. He asks, "How can intelligent people believe that yesterday's enemies on the basis of religion can become today's friends? This can only happen if one of the two parties abandons his religion. So look and see which one of them is the one who has abandoned it: Sheikh Sharif or America?"[71]

Al-Shabaab's Strategic Outlook

Today, Al-Shabaab is a capable fighting force that implements a strict version of Shari'a in key areas of Somalia. Its range is enhanced by training camps from which many Western Muslims have graduated. This has made Al-Shabaab a significant security concern to several countries, including the United States.

Terrorist training. Given the relationship noted above between Al-Shabaab and Al-Qaeda, which includes ideological affinity and interlocking leadership, there are worries about Al-Shabaab's connections to transnational terrorism. These concerns are bolstered by Al-Shabaab's operation of terrorist training camps, successors to the ICU camps.

One of the clearest signs that training camps have reopened in Somalia is an exodus of young Somali men from Minneapolis-St. Paul and elsewhere in the United States.[72] There are further

reports of young Somali men going missing from Canada, Europe, Australia, and Saudi Arabia.[73] A senior U.S. military intelligence officer reports that simultaneous disappearances in several countries are best explained by the reopening of Somali training facilities such as those in Ras Kamboni.[74]

The biggest concern is not what these individuals do while in Somalia but what happens when they return to the countries from which they came. It is a concern not only for the United States but also Britain: The *Times* of London reports that the British security services believe that "[d]ozens of Islamic extremists have returned to Britain from terror training camps in Somalia."[75] British intelligence analysts are concerned about possible terror attacks in the U.K., and British television has reported that an October 2007 suicide bombing in Somalia was thought to have been carried out by a U.K.-raised bomber.[76] Peter Neumann of the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence at King's College, London, told Channel 4 News: "The numbers I hear (going from Britain to Somalia) are 50, 60 or 70, but in reality we don't know. You don't need big numbers for terrorism."[77]

Al-Shabaab's training is both military and ideological. In 2006, Frederick Nzwili, a Nairobi-based journalist, reported that training camps run by Aweys and Al-Shabaab founder Aden Hashi Ayro "included indoctrination into fundamentalist ideology aimed at advocating jihad in Islamic states."[78] The *Economist* notes the fundamentalist environment in which Al-Shabaab's training occurs, wherein recruits "are expected to disavow music, videos, cigarettes and *qat*, the leaf Somali men chew most afternoons to get mildly high."[79]

Military capabilities. It is difficult to say how many fighters make up Al-Shabaab's militia. Some estimates suggest between 6,000 and 7,000.[80] Al-Shabaab is battle-ready, given that Somalia's history is replete with fighters who have experience with asymmetrical warfare, small unit tactics, and a wide array of weaponry. One tactic that Al-Shabaab is said to have introduced to Somalia is suicide bombing. They have also carried out assassination attempts against Somali government officials.[81]

Overall, Al-Shabaab fought competently against the Ethiopians. In late 2008, it made geographical gains and consolidated power in the Lower Juba region, allowing it to establish a Shari'a-based administration there on September 5. It also showed itself able to strike Mogadishu. In late October, Al-Shabaab carried out five suicide bombings in northern Somalia, killing twenty-eight people.[82] One of the bombers, Shirwa Ahmed, was a naturalized American citizen, the United States' first successful suicide bomber.[83]

By the end of 2008, the Ethiopian government could no longer sustain its occupation. In early January 2009, trucks filled with Ethiopian soldiers left Mogadishu. Large numbers of Somali

parliament members also fled; settling in Djibouti, they set up reconciliation talks that doubled the size of parliament to include Islamist members linked to the Alliance for the Reliberation of Somalia. They also selected ARS leader Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed as their new president. Though Sharif expressed optimism that he could "improve the situation in Somalia and establish genuine peace and reconciliation in my country,"[84] others were less sanguine. "Where will this parliament go?" asked Abdiweli Ali, a former adviser to the transitional government. "The seat of government has already been captured by Al-Shabaab."[85]

As Ethiopian forces left, Al-Shabaab had a substantial area of control, including Baidoa in south-central Somalia and Kismayo in the far south. Moreover, its capabilities may have been magnified by the arrival of other Islamic fighters. In late April 2009, Associated Press reported that battle-hardened extremists from safe havens along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border were entering East Africa. Part of the concern, according to U.S. officials, is that these extremists could "pass on sophisticated training and attack techniques gleaned from seven years at war against the U.S. and allies in Iraq and Afghanistan."[86]

Implementation of Shari'a law. Al-Shabaab has imposed a strict version of Shari'a in the areas it has captured, normally forming an administration to oversee Shari'a and other matters relating to law and governance. In September 2008, it announced a new administration for Kismayo that included "several committees that will run the town," a district commissioner, head of information, head of security, head of finance, and head of preaching.[87] It later formed a similar administration in Marka.[88]

The strictness of Al-Shabaab's Shari'a rulings can be seen in the laws that it has implemented and the punishments it has meted out. Amnesty International claims that a 13-year-old rape victim was stoned to death in Kismayo last year for alleged adultery.[89] In late 2008, as Al-Shabaab seized Marka, leaders informed residents that cinema houses and music recording studios were banned. [90] It also warned that action would be taken against anyone found on the streets or opening their shop during prayer times. In January 2009, in the same city, Al-Shabaab executed a politician for apostasy, alleging his cooperation with Ethiopian forces.[91] On January 28, they amputated the hand of a Kismayo man convicted of stealing fishing nets. In February, they sentenced a number of youths caught using narcotic drugs in Baidoa to public lashings.[92]

Al-Shabaab intends to continue expanding Shari'a. In an audio message on January 2009, the group's emir Sheikh Mukhtar Abdirahman Abu Zubeyr said that democracy and communism had failed in Somalia because both political systems "were incongruent with the teachings of the Islamic religion." His message called for widespread implementation of Shari'a.[93]

In addition to Shari'a, Al-Shabaab has implemented other rules designed to help it maintain power. It has implemented rules directed at journalists "requiring that no reports be disseminated of which the administration was unaware, that only 'factual' news be presented, that nothing detrimental to the practice of Shari'a be reported, and that no music be played on the radio that encouraged 'sin.'"[94]

Al-Shabaab's rules have been enforced not only by administrative methods but also through intimidation. In 2008, London's *Sunday Times* reported that Al-Shabaab was shutting down "objectionable" business sectors in Mogadishu by carrying out selective attacks and sending "night letter" warnings to other business owners.[95]

At times, Somalis have expressed violent displeasure with these new rules. In January 2009, for example, Kismayo residents rioted after Al-Shabaab transformed a soccer stadium into a market. [96] But there are also signs that the group listens to public outcries and that there is a pragmatic side to its activities. For example, Al-Shabaab has undertaken public works programs such as building a canal connecting Jannaale, Golweyn, and Buulo Mareer.[97] Additionally, because Somalia has been mired in anarchy since the early 1990s, many Somalis find even Al-Shabaab's strict version of Shari'a preferable to lawlessness.

Conclusion

A number of governments now look upon Al-Shabaab's rise as a major security concern. Its commitment to global jihadism, joint leadership with Al-Qaeda, and military capabilities are likely to make it a problem for some time to come.

Al-Shabaab does face certain challenges from within Somalia. For example, it has clashed with another Islamist group, Ahlu Sunna wa'l-Jama'a. Despite Al-Shabaab's military capabilities, Ahlu Sunna has been able to bloody its nose on more than one occasion. In late December 2008, Ahlu Sunna fighters killed more than ten Al-Shabaab mujahideen in a single weekend.[98] In late January 2009, Ahlu Sunna captured the Dhuusa Mareeb District in central Somalia.[99] There is a doctrinal element to these skirmishes: Though both groups are Islamist, favoring incorporating Islamic law into the laws of the state, Ahlu Sunna adheres to traditional Somali Sufi religious practice—something Al-Shabaab's hard-line Salafi outlook staunchly opposes.

Though such internal challenges may be exploited by the United States, Somali political Islam will be with us for a long time. As Menkhaus told *The Washington Post*, Somali leaders "are increasingly required to present themselves in some fashion as Islamist."[100] Against this backdrop, the top U.S. priority should be containment of the danger that Al-Shabaab and other Islamist groups pose outside Somalia's borders. The fact is that U.S. policies have left a legacy of

mistakes and missed opportunities. To move forward, policymakers will need to recognize past U.S. mistakes and understand the strategic challenges posed by groups such as Al-Shabaab.

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[1] Daveed Gartenstein-Ross and Kyle Dabruzzi, "Is Al-Qaeda's Central Leadership Still Relevant?" *Middle East Quarterly*, Spring 2008, pp. 27-36; Daveed Gartenstein-Ross, "While Pakistan Burns," *The Weekly Standard*, Oct. 29, 2007.

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